

WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) today joined a bipartisan group of lawmakers in sending a letter to the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the House Appropriations Committee and Subcommittee on Science, State, Justice, and Commerce urging the Committees to restore full funding to the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program. This year, the President's budget proposal drastically cut the program's budget from fiscal year 2005's enacted level of nearly \$300 million to \$100 million, effectively terminating the current HIDTA program.

Representative Hoyer is a major proponent of the HIDTA program, having been instrumental in having the Washington/Baltimore corridor designated a HIDTA in 1993. The program coordinates the efforts of federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, focusing funding on high drug trafficking regions of the country. Rep. Hoyer has secured more than \$112 million to coordinate and fund efforts to combat drug trafficking in this region since 1994.

"We are writing to ask you to oppose the Administration's proposals for the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program at the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP)," said the lawmakers in the letter. "The Administration has, as part of its budget submission, made two proposals for HIDTA: first, drastically cutting the program's budget from fiscal year 2005's enacted level of \$228,350,000 to \$100,000,000; and second, moving the remaining \$100 million of the program to the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) program at the Department of Justice.

"If enacted, these proposals would effectively terminate the current HIDTA program. We believe that such a result would severely undermine federal, state, and local drug enforcement cooperation and coordination, threatening to undo the substantial progress we have made in reducing drug abuse since 2001. We hope that you will restore full funding to the HIDTA program, and keep it at its authorized location in ONDCP.

"The budget cut proposed by the Administration – 56 percent of last year's enacted level – would shut down most of the task forces, intelligence centers, and 'deconfliction' activities funded by the program. Either most of the 28 individual HIDTAs would have to be eliminated, or all of them would have to accept very deep cuts.

"The Administration has been unable to provide any information to Congress about how it would implement this 56 percent cut. As of yet, they claim to have no firm plan about how to reduce the program – instead, they insist that Congress simply grant them the authority in advance to

make the cuts.

“The Administration’s lack of a plan is disturbing, given the potentially severe impact these cuts will have on drug enforcement. Seven representatives of state and local law enforcement agencies from around the country who work with the HIDTA program testified about that impact before the Criminal Justice Subcommittee on March 10, 2005. Baltimore Police Commissioner Leonard Hamm told us that his anti-heroin and anti-drug gang task forces would also be ended without HIDTA assistance.

“Eliminating or eviscerating the individual HDTAs would be a far greater financial loss to federal drug enforcement efforts than simply the \$128 million reduction in the budget. State and local agencies make very significant contributions of their own agents, employees, office space, and equipment to HIDTA task forces – most of which are not reimbursed with federal dollars and which dwarf, in their dollar value, the federal budget components of the individual HDTAs. We risk losing those contributions if the federal government ends the balanced control of HIDTA operations,” the lawmakers added.

Copies of the full text of the letter are available upon request. Please call Katie Elbert at 202-225-4131.

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